THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) There is no specific International Youth Satellite Scheme for Africa.

(c) and (d) The cost of establishing the Pan-African Network for e-connectivity to African countries, as announced by the President of India, has been provisionally estimated to be around US$50 million. It is also expected that the setting up of the network would be done in a phased manner in partnership with the African countries in a period of around 24 months from the date of commencement of the project.

New technology for rural areas

358. SHRI R.K. ANAND: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that US and UK are in the process of implementing a new technology which allows television, phone and data transfer in a single network;

(b) whether it is a fact that TRAI is willing to push this technology as the most preferred one for rural areas; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) have reported that they follow a technology neutral approach and have carried out a consultation process for promoting telecommunication services in rural areas.

Introduction of cheaper local landline call charges

359. SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are considering to introduce cheaper local landline call charges and mobile roaming charges;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are aware that some kind of cartelisation among private cellular companies exists and instead of investing on towers, they are using the infrastructure of other companies; and

(d) if so, the steps being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) The tariff for telecom services is now regulated by the TRAI (Telecome Regulatory Authority of India). As per the TRAI guidelines the tariffs are under forbearance, except for monthly rentals, number of free calls and call charges for telephone services including WLL (F), in rural areas and roaming charges for mobile services. Accordingly all the service providers including the BSNL and MTNL are fixing their own tariff from time to time.

At present there is no such proposal in the above two public sector companies to introduce the cheaper landline call charges and mobile roaming charges.

(c) and (d) As per the license condition the sharing of 'passive' infrastructure *viz.*, building, tower, dark fibre etc. is permitted and some operators are sharing the infrastructure.

Opening of new Post Offices

360. PROF. M.M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of proposals for opening of new post offices in the rural areas pending with Government, State-wise;

(b) the details of targets set to open post offices in the country during the financial year 2004-05 and 2005-06; and

(c) if so, the details of achievements made in this respect?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) There are 116 proposals pending for opening of Post Offices in various circles as on 15.7.2005 throughout the country. Circle-wise details of pending proposals is given in the Statement (*See* below).